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DRAGONS HAVE TO BE KILLED

William Colby, the Colorless CIA Director, Was Tired of Battling James Angleton, the Agency's Mysterious Counterspy. But How Does a Bureaucrat Get Rid of a Legend?

By Burton Hersh

One weekend this May, struggling to maintain some poise but betraying the discomfiture of an assistant headmaster whose chair had been slipped out from under him one time too many, the vice chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Senator Patrick Leahy, whistled in the media to announce his intention to launch an immediate inquiry. Despite the law's requirement and the Reagan administration's statements that at least the chairmen and vice chairmen of both the Senate and House intelligence committees must be adequately informed of all covert activities, the Vermont Democrat was clearly worked up at the extent to which "things have fallen between the cracks."

The detonation the previous week of a car bomb in Beirut that killed more than 80 people was the direct consequence, according to the *Washington Post*, of a late-1984 administration directive to the Central Intelligence Agency to put together native teams for "pre-emptive strikes" against suspected local terrorists. Of this initiative—promptly denied by the administration itself—virtually nothing had reached the ears of Leahy and his fellow Democrats because none of them had enough of an inkling of the administration's covert intentions to frame the right questions during intelligence-committee hearings. As for that car bombing? Under attack from reporters, the magisterial Leahy had pressed for answers and "found out about it on my own." To preclude subsequent bushwhacking, Leahy announced, "We're going to review six or seven operations. I do not want my side to get caught on a Nicaraguan-mining type problem."

It's been a decade since cataclysm came close to obliterating the Central Intelligence Agency; Senator Leahy's public desperation was itself a measure of how far Agency leadership had vitiated the oversight-and-disclosure process and returned the clandestine establishment to business as usual.

Ten years ago, responding to the public's outrage at reports of broad-scale domestic mail-opening programs, drug travesties, and decades of bungled assassination plots, the post-Watergate Congress set up its first sweeping investigation of the CIA since authorizing the Agency in 1947. Down bureaucratic rat holes, like so many fire-hose nozzles, the Pike and Church Committees seconded by the Rockefeller Commission let loose a torrent of investigators and depositions and conscience-stricken case officers and subpoenas and discovery documents and unfriendly witnesses until month by month the deepest catacombs of the intelligence community were swamped to the rafters. Out into the publicity of the hour there streamed an incredible proliferation of espionage mavens and subversion impresarios, species rarely identified before, many bobtailed and indignant at such a historic interruption.

Least unhappy-looking, friends of the intelligence community kept noticing, was the Agency's tidy little director. It was William Colby, after all, whose slips to newsmen had all but sounded the alarms; now he seemed blithe enough, and forthcoming at all times before the swarming investigative bodies. "Bill, do you really have to present all this material to us?" a heavy-

Burton Hersh has been working on a book about the CIA for two years. He has written for *The Washingtonian* about diplomat-lawyer Sol Linowitz and Senator Edward Kennedy; his previous books include *The Mellon Family* and *The Education of Edward Kennedy.*

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